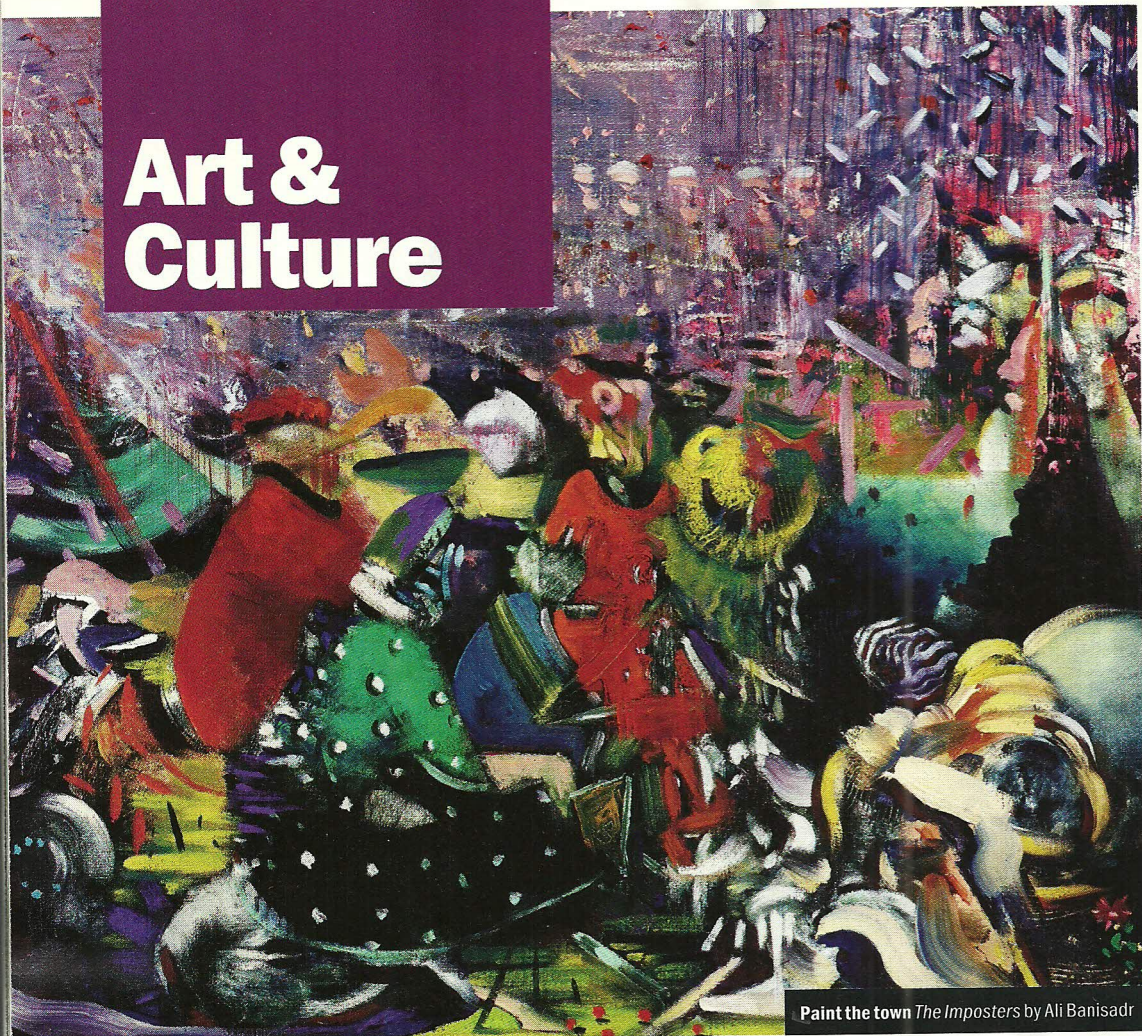


Art & Culture



Paint the town *The Imposters* by Ali Banisadr

State of flux

A new art show brings together four artists who explore the territory between abstraction and figuration says **Varsha Reshamwala**.

Between *Worlds*, an exhibition curated by Oxford-based Jane Neal, is a group show by four international contemporary artists, who hail from diverse cultures namely that of Romania, Iran, Puerto Rico and Britain. The exhibition draws its title from the fact that all the artists work in a space between the abstract and figurative worlds. They do so in their own, distinct ways, collapsing borders between history and myth, the personal and the political, the real and the virtual, and fantasy and fact. What binds the artists together in their pursuits is their emphasis on the process of painting and the physicality of it. "Painters, especially are involved in a process and a disciple that is part thought, part instinct, part action, it is all about the 'between'," explained Neal, in an email interview with *Time Out*.

New York-based artist Ali Banisadr, 38, spent his formative years in strife-stricken Tehran where he was witness to the Iran-Iraq war. Brightly coloured and brimming with energy, his creations please the eye; but a closer inspection reveals clamour and chaos. What appear to be dense figurative groupings turn out to be whirling abstract patterns that convey an uneasy sense of movement. Memories of the war and resulting violence clearly seep into his canvases. "His works are rooted in his personal recollections, as well as in a collective memory and thorough understanding of art movements," explained Neal in the exhibition catalogue.

Thankfully, Banisadr's selection for the group show goes beyond mundane observations of him merely working at the boundaries of figuration and abstraction.

"His paintings reflect these two worlds [Iran and New York] in terms of cultural references but also art history; with the Northern European Renaissance and Persian miniatures both providing inspiration," said Neal. The artist also explores violence, exuberance and the space in-between, as in *The Imposters* in which carnival-like figures in pointed hats and bright robes appear to engage in brutalities.

Like Banisadr, Romanian Marius Bercea, 35, also draws inspiration from his native country, where he continues to live and work. He strives to capture the history of Romania in his works, especially the fall of the communist bloc and the rise of Western capitalism in the country, post 1989. Romania's social, political and cultural scene also finds place on his

canvases, as does its landscape and architecture. In a work titled *Curtain of Leisure*, which is part of the show, a large stadium-like building painted in a decaying off-white shade, is set against a delectable backdrop of lush trees and bright skies of orange, pink and purple. The fertile landscape contrasts sharply with the crumbling structure. It makes you wonder whether the scene is a real or an imagined one? Whether it is a vision for the future or a lingering memory from the past? Or perhaps it falls somewhere in-between.

Thirty-three year-old Puerto Rico born, Brooklyn-based Angel Otero's paintings border on the sculptural. His canvases protrude outwards in folds and bends, resembling crumpled clothes after a wash, or creased skins of the very old.

Explaining how he achieves this three-dimensional effect on a flat canvas, he said, "I create the painting first on Plexiglas in a very conventional way, then start to cover the entire surface with layers of oil paint. After it starts to dry on a rack for about a month, I peel and scrape the oil paint off in sheets and transfer it onto a canvas." The end result therefore is always unexpected, just as the painterly gestures of the twentieth century action painters were, whom Otero counts as an influence.

Although Otero's works appear to swing more towards the abstract, rather than settle "between" that and the figurative, Neal justified it, "This in its own way lends them an anthropomorphic quality. There is a strong sense of signification," she added, "like a shoe or a glove that, when we see it, instantly reminds the viewer of the human attachment to the wearer."

Finally, 51 year old Turner prize-nominated Fiona Rae's; works juxtapose bright colour with black patches, flat areas of paint with dragged, daubed marks and spontaneity with very controlled strokes. Her vivid abstractions come across as constellations in the dark night. Teddies, bunnies and stars float dreamlike on her canvases; but the familiarity triggered by these kitsch childhood icons, roots the associations in the physical realm. This constant state of flux and restlessness characterises Rae's works.

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